

Joseph and the Sin of Pride

Introduction

Too often our interpretation of a biblical text is skewed by tradition, by the authorities we listen to, by our own misunderstanding of a text, or because we did not apply ourselves to greater diligence of study. In most cases, such errors in interpretation are made quite innocently and do not necessarily create a problem with the overall message of a lesson or sermon. Nevertheless, a teacher or preacher or anyone who proclaims the gospel – especially from a pulpit to a sanctuary filled with trusting listeners – must go the extra mile and give due diligence to getting the story right before proclaiming it as truth.

In 2014, I heard a pastor preach a series of messages based on Genesis 37. This pastor accused Joseph of being guilty of the sin of pride. And he is not alone in this interpretation of Joseph's character and motives.

A Jewish website called MyJewishLearning.com hosted an article by Rabbi Bradley Artson who wrote, "Joseph has the potential to fill his life with friendship, family and love. Yet his need to be preeminent, his need to belittle the gifts and experiences of this family in order to glorify his own talents, isolate him from his own kin. We get a clue about the extent of Joseph's pride from the very start." ⁱ

David Guzik commented, "Joseph seems to be afflicted with the sort of pride often apparent among the favored and blessed. He is so focused on how great his dreams are for *him*, he doesn't begin to consider how the dreams will sound in the ears of *others*." (Italics are his.) ⁱⁱ

Even R. C. Sproul, for whom I have the utmost respect, is included in those who accuse Joseph of the sin of pride. In a lesson from his website (www.ligonier.com), Dr. Sproul said that Joseph "was somewhat arrogant and self-absorbed." ⁱⁱⁱ In the same lesson, Dr. Sproul included the following statements concerning Joseph:

"Joseph also seems to revel in his status as Jacob's most beloved child."

"Joseph's pride should be seen as sinful and foolish."

"Joseph's haughtiness only worsened his precarious situation and shows us the danger of pride."

In answer to a question concerning the life of Joseph, an unidentified online author (www.gotquestions.org) replied, "As a 17-year-old shepherd, Joseph is something of a tattletale, bringing a bad report about his brothers to their father (Genesis 37:2)." ^{iv}

This unfortunate interpretation concerning the prideful nature of Joseph has been taught for so long and by such leading biblical authorities that most people seem to take it for granted that Joseph was, in fact, guilty of this most abhorrent of all sins (Prov. 16:5). Yet a straight-forward reading of the text of Gen. 37:1-11 will yield no direct evidence that Joseph ever acted or responded toward any person or situation with an attitude of pride. In fact, these verses yield no direct evidence at all concerning any motives for Joseph's actions, any misstep in his behavior, or any malicious aspect of his character.

Curious about such a straightforward and undocumented assessment of Joseph as was given on the website previously mentioned (www.gotquestions.org), I emailed the website and asked, "Other than surmise, conjecture, and guesswork, what direct biblical evidence (chapter and verse) can anyone put forward that Joseph was prideful before his brothers and his family?"

I soon received the following email reply from a person identified only as Kevin:

There is nothing in Scripture that points to Joseph's being proud or out of line in sharing his visions with his family. His brothers hated him, but that does not mean that Joseph was at fault. The notion that Joseph was prideful comes from interpreters'/teachers' assumptions. The Bible simply tells what Joseph said and did, which was to share God's revelation with others.

In the sermon mentioned at the beginning of this article, the pastor offered three items of evidence from the story of Joseph's betrayal in Genesis 37 to support the idea that Joseph was guilty of pride.

In verse 2, Joseph gave a "bad report" to Jacob concerning the behavior of the brothers.

In verses 3 and 4, Jacob made for Joseph "an ornate robe" (NIV) which Joseph proudly wore to remind his brothers that "their father loved him more than any of them" (NIV).

In verses 5-11, Joseph shared his dreams with his brothers on at least two occasions, apparently for the purpose of lording his status over his brothers.

In the next three blog entries, we will investigate the accusation of pride against Joseph using the three sermon points mentioned above, beginning with the subject of the **Bad Report** (Gen. 37:2). This will be followed by a look at the truth behind the **Beautiful Coat** that Joseph wore (Gen. 37:3-4). The final lesson will study the **Baffling Dreams** that Joseph had that caused such consternation in his family (Gen. 37:5-11).

[Click here](#) to download this article in PDF format.

ⁱ Artson, Rabbi Bradley. "From Pride Comes Loneliness." MyJewishLearning, Inc. Web. 21 Nov. 2014.
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/aboutus/abindex.shtml>

ⁱⁱ <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/guzik/genesis/37.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/joseph-goes-dothan/>

^{iv} <http://www.gotquestions.org/life-Joseph.html#ixzz3Jje6ENTI>